DON BLUTH'S

TOON TALK

July 2001 Vol. 2 Number 4 Issue 8 Phoenix, AZ.

Applying The Principles Of Animation

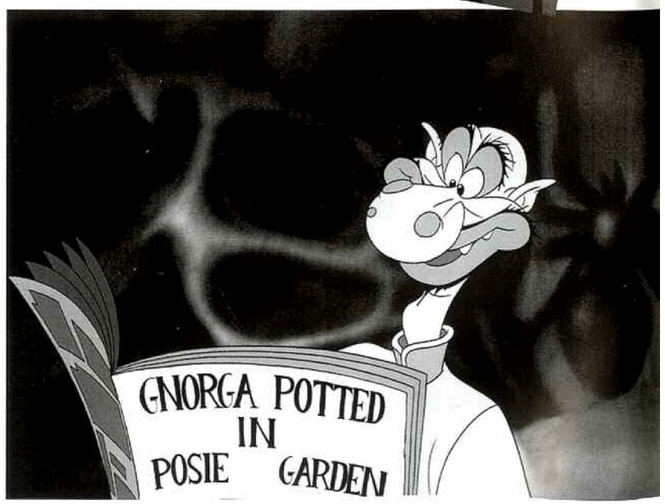
Woolie Takes Over For Walt

Dragon's Lair Episode VIII

$5.95

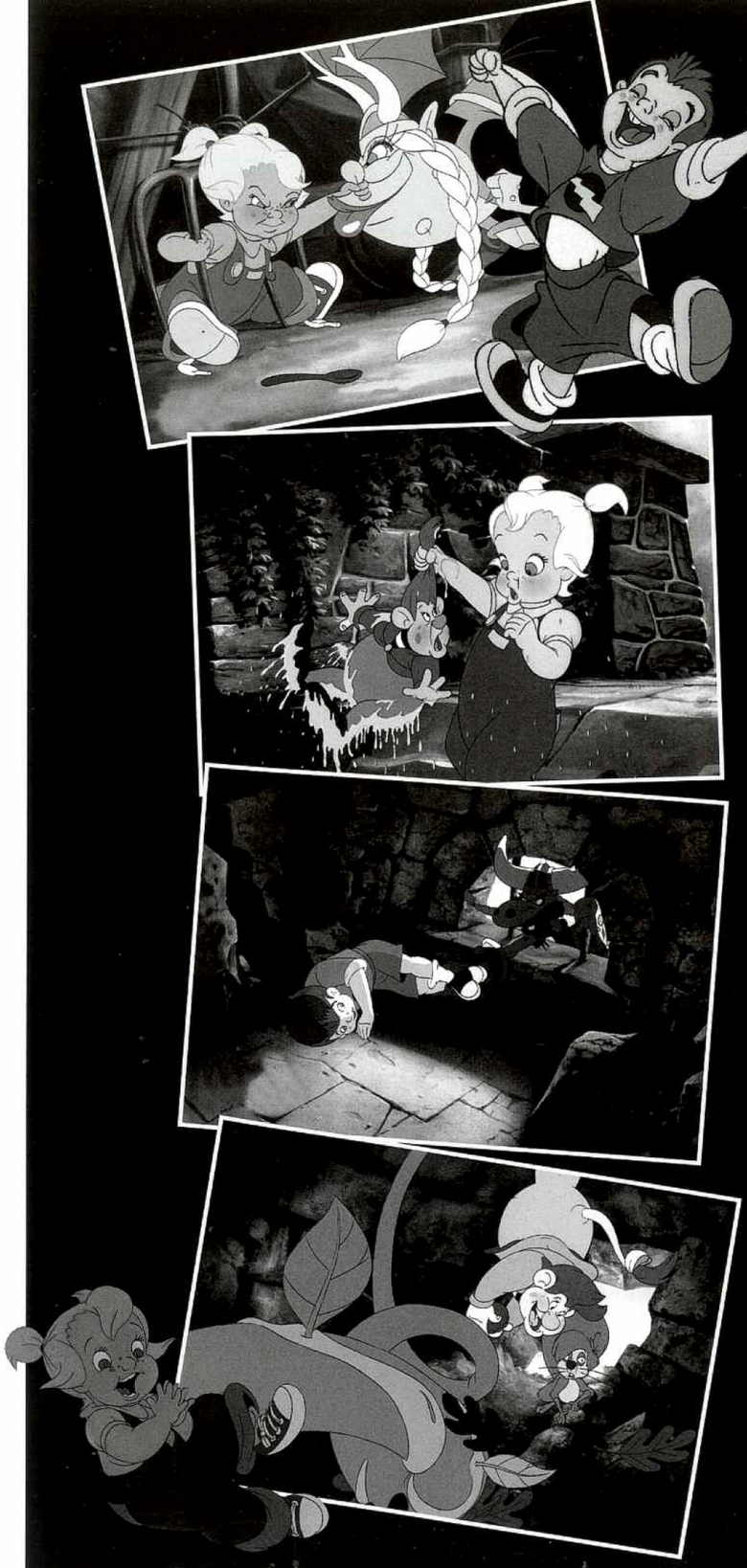
A TROLL IN CENTRAL PARK

As it is never a good thing that a child is born prematurely, so it is with producing a film. Development of a script is like the development of a child in the womb: It takes time and must be done right. Building the movie, *A Troll In Central Park,* taught us this lesson, but indeed, the hard way. If we had we spent six more months developing this movie, it could have resonated with the audience and been more successful. How did Shakespeare put it? "Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, and signifying nothing". A movie can fit that same description. A good story requires a sympathetic hero, a theme, an odious villain and a goal we can root for; something about which we really do care about. So in hindsight, I wish we could have spent more time in production. Stanley could have been a richer character with more levels to his personality. Maybe he could have had a dark side, a troll side that he struggled with. Such an inner conflict would have been interesting. It worked for Jekyll and Hyde. As is, Stanley is merely a good-natured guy with a green thumb, a guy that is victimized by his fellow trolls, and that's a bit boring. Inner conflict would have made his triumph over evil, in the end more satisfying.



Queen Gnorga and King Lort are furious to discover that Stanley is living happily in Central Park, New York.

I tell you all this in the hope that you might benefit from our foolish mistakes. Scrutinizing your own work is so important, but let's face it, we all are afraid of not measuring up, so we stubbornly cling to our own opinions, shutting out all others. If an idea is weak, don't you want to know that privately before you publish it to the world and make a complete fool of yourself? Of course you do! And by the way, I'm not just talking about script, but character designs, layouts, color keys, music, voice talent, the whole gamut. Any artist that is worth his salt will keep asking him/herself the same question over and over, that is, "Is this the best idea?" Contrast that question with this statement – "Is this my best work?" The first question is far more searching and indifferent to authorship or source. To answer it requires fresh eyes, new opinions, and a teachable mind. Train yourself to forever be a student, even though you are accomplished in your art and skills. Remember someone is out there that knows more than you. Embrace this idea and you will continue to grow.



THE COLORS OF TROLL

Gus takes his little sister, Rosie, to play in Central Park, where they make a wild discovery.

Stanley, the troll with the green thumb, is equally surprised to meet the two children.

Stanley is enamored with Rosie. He adopts her as his own family. It's love at first glance.

Queen Gnorga, who banished Stanley from Troll Land, is furious when she hears Stanley is happy.

With his green thumb, Stanley creates a wonderland of beauty for his new friends, Rosie and Gus.

Gnorga makes plans to overtake Stanley and change him into a stone statue.

In the maelstrom of a tornado, Queen Gnorga rockets towards Central Park, and Stanley's demise.

She even brings along her yellow raincoat for the storm she will create.

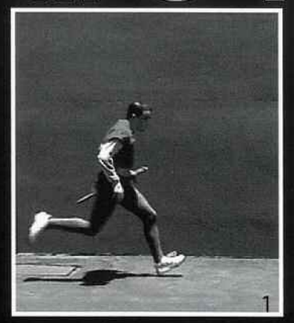
Queen Gnorga and King Lort plot the kidnapping of Rosie in order to catch Stanley.

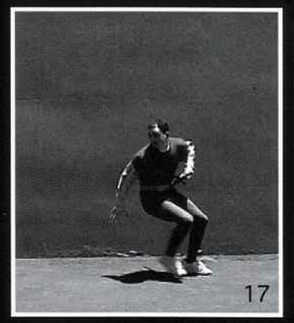
Stanley is afraid to fight Gnorga. Gus accuses him of being a coward.

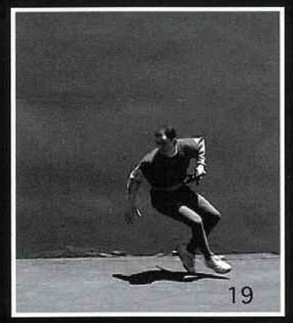
Finally, Gnorga captures Rosie which draws Stanley, wholeheartedly, into the battle.

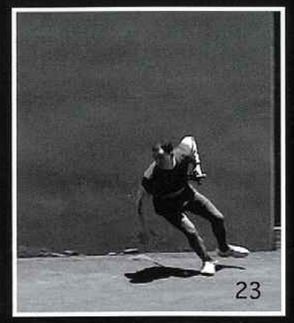
The evil Troll Queen is changed into a beautiful Rosebush by Stanley's new found magic.

MOTION STUDY



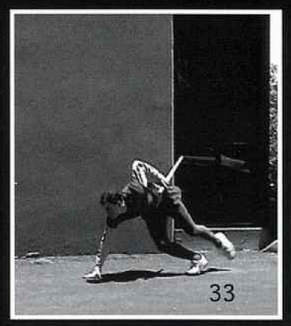


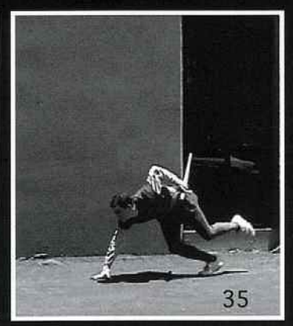


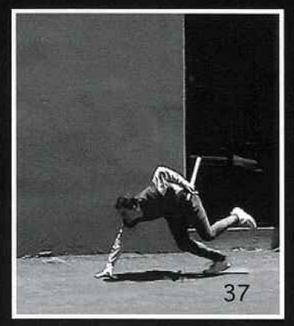


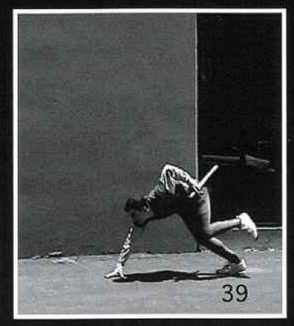
Variety is the spice of life. Variety is also what gives animation its universal appeal. No two animators approach the art in the same way, but each has his/her own unique style or flare. Tex Avery, is outrageously funny, Chuck Jones is satirical, and Milt Kahl is elegant, robust and vigorous. In trying to find your own style, may I suggest that it will spring from your own imagination, but only when it's good and ready. Meantime, you'll borrow ideas from whoever's work appeals to you.

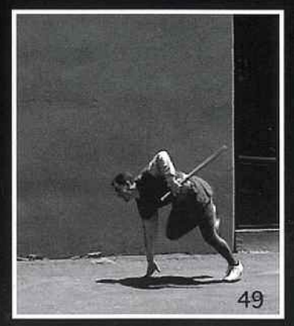
In the adolescent years of animation (I'm speaking now of Disney history), analysis of action was the order of the day. It was the preamble to even the most

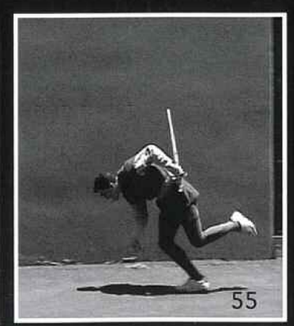




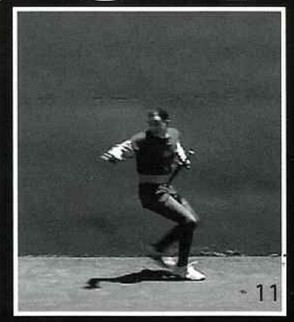


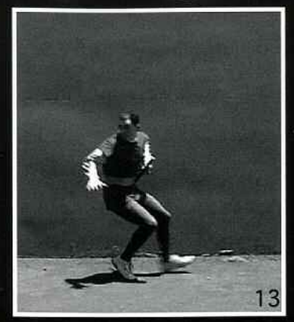


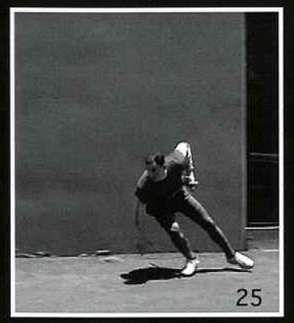


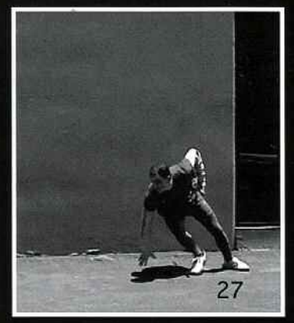


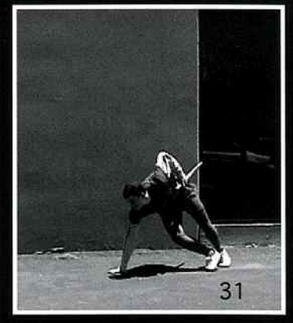
ACTION





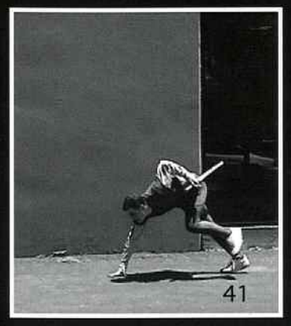


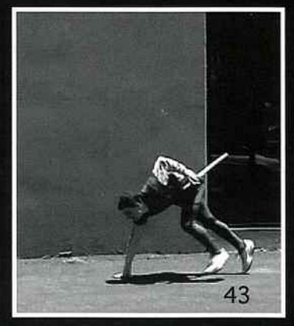


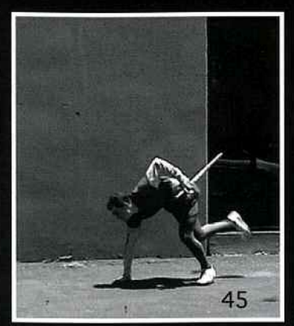


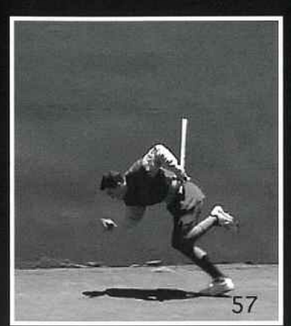
broad based cartooning. See the action as normal, then bend it towards the absurd. Analyze the action in reality, then caricature it. Certainly, the feature film required subtlety of movement to portray believable emotions. In telling a dramatic story, the artist's pencil scratchings have to be downplayed.

On this page, I've included a character running. Suddenly, from behind, someone calls his name. He changes his mind then reverses direction. The action is both "acting" and "athletic". This action can be translated into any of the varieties of animation. It's always your choice.

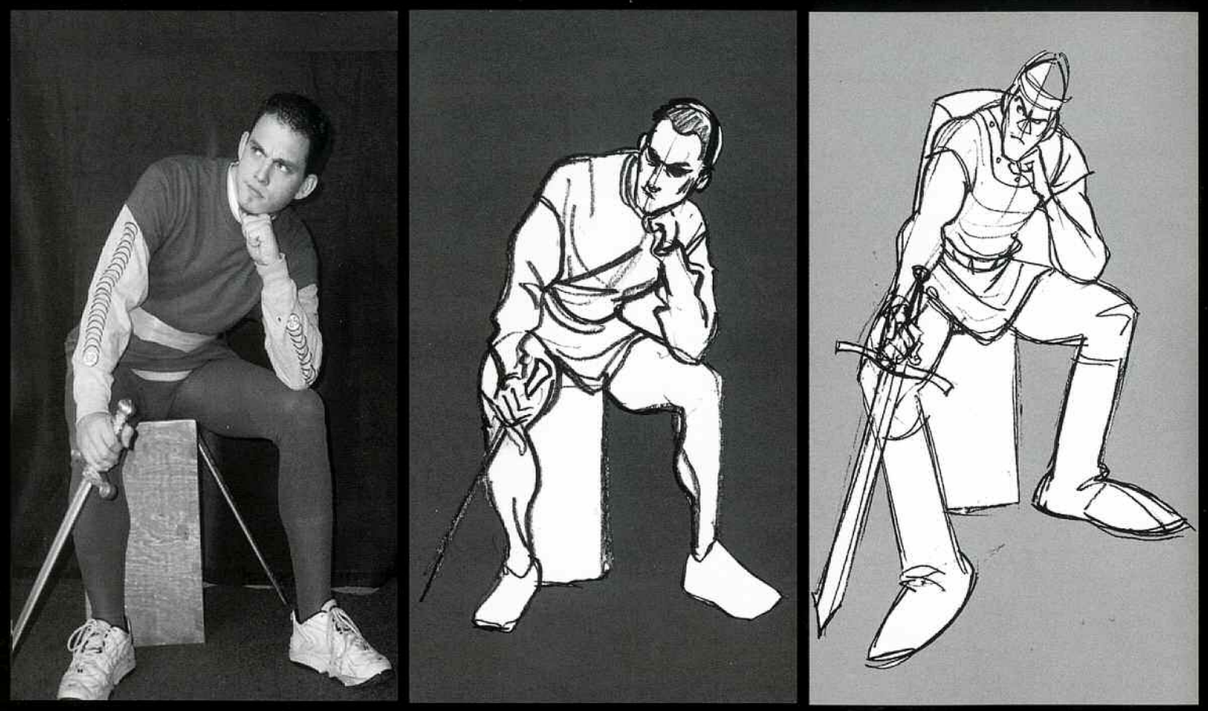








LIFE DRAWING



Live Model

Life Drawing

Caricature

& CARICATURE

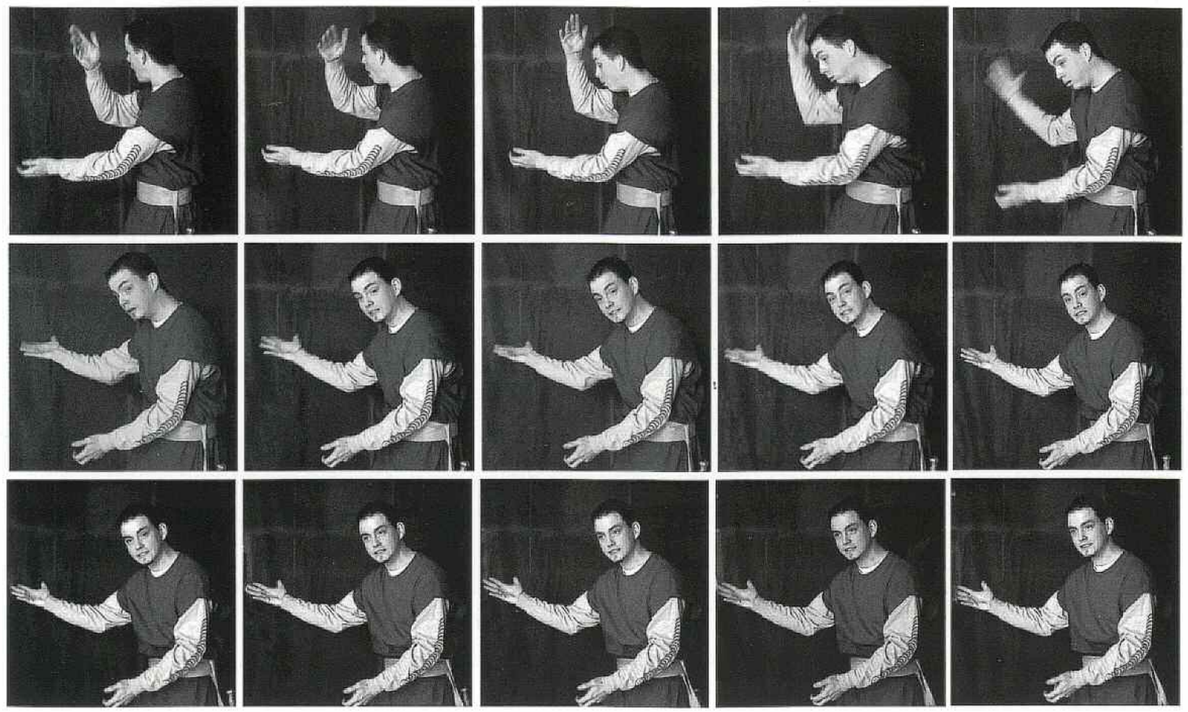
Animators seldom reach out for photo reality in their work, and yet, the buzz word for aspiring wannabes is "life drawing". I certainly agree that life drawing is the basic exercise for getting to know the human figure, but I've often wondered, why not just draw a caricature from the live model and skip the in-between realistic version? Years ago, I answered my own question, and it is this: There is an understanding gained in drawing the photo-real step. This step is a translation from the 3D real life world into a 2D on paper world. It is the study of shapes, spaces, and rhythm of line. It is certainly plenty to deal with before plunging into the challenge of caricature. Walk before run, milk before meat, they always say.

Now, may I share a point of view with you just to help you on your journey. "Caricature" is a million dollar word, but quite simple put, it means to capture the essence of the subject in its simplest form. To do this, you can't just look at something with your natural eyes. That's not really seeing it. You must see the subject with the eyes of understanding, in other words, your heart. See beyond the physical. What does it represent? Some wisened old masters even claim our physical world is only a reflection of a more substantial reality. This may seem confusing at first, but keep trying to see the real image. A human being is a conglomerate of traditions, feelings, contradictions, and emotional baggage. Those ingredients lie way beyond flesh and bones, and the science of mere human anatomy. The body is a mortal husk. What animates it is the spirit, or the spirit's personality. Search for that!

During the making of Anastasia, I read as many books as I could, trying to discover the personality of the princess. She was the youngest of the four Romanov girls, and the most spirited. Her flare for the dramatic, and her impish pranks, often pulled the family and the royal court from the grip of despair and depression. Her nickname was "Little Sunshine". The entire family, were photo-enthusiasts. Anastasia's photos always had a unique spin, like she was trying to say something entertaining, not merely document an event. For example, once she took her own photo sitting in a swing, but positioned the camera so as to hide the support ropes and give the impression she was levitating in air, all the while, tossing a pixie smile at the lens. That is creative!

We live in an age where the electronic horn of plenty spills out and nearly smothers everything you see. So take advantage of that. Buy a digital camera and record interesting people around you. Study their walks, and their schticks, then describe what you see. Maybe write a small character description of it. Be specific. Ask yourself questions. Why is one person funny and another not? Why is one morbid or sad? If you will do this exercise, the next time you draw, you will see an amazing difference in your approach to your work, and also your success in it. Go deeper. See beyond the flesh. Some women are lovely in their bones, even when time is measured by the sway of their walk. Do it!

Acting Requires imagination, innovation, and lots of practice. Explore the actors playground and be a better animator.



The MANUSCRIPT

Mechar, with Willow at his side, have been examining Nuala's latest collection of drawings. Satisfied that she comprehends the 7 yardsticks, both decide to open up discussions with her regarding animation itself.

MECHAR
So my dear, give us your definition of animation.

NUALA
To bring something to life.

MECHAR
Not quite. None of us is really clever enough to bring something to life. We'll leave that to the Gods. But we can craft something with our art. That gives the illusion of life.

WILLOW
But illusions are illusive. When they're poorly done, there's no magic at all.

MECHAR
A bad movie is a nightmare, but under the baton of a master director, a master actor, or master artist, it's like soaking up pure sunshine while dangling your toes in a cold stream, happy as a dog.

NUALA
Well, my dear mentors, I trust you will show me how to be a good illusionist. There's no thrill in being just a "hack".

WILLOW
My sentiments exactly.

MECHAR
Okay, here goes ...

The Master Animator takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. He doesn't speak for several minutes, then, ...

MECHAR
Before you can create a savory illusion of life, you should spend some time analyzing things around you, both animate and inanimate ...

WILLOW
...There are only two categories:
1. Things that act (living things), and
2. Things that are acted upon (objects)

MECHAR
Life is motion. Everything is constantly moving from the spheres in the universe, right down to micro molecules. The speed at which a body travels is determined by the time allowed to transverse the distance from point A to point B.

WILLOW
Mechar, please. This isn't a science forum. Simplify it. Sorry Nuala.

MECHAR
Okay, okay! Animation is a series of drawings that define a motion or action. Each of the drawings is slightly different from its predecessors. Each describes a tiny piece of an action that took place over a period of time.

WILLOW
You're blathering again. Let me try. Let's say a man jumps over a box. The camera shoots at 24 frames per second. So if it takes him two seconds to complete the action, how many still frames will the camera shoot?

NUALA
That's easy! 2 x 24 or 48 frames

WILLOW
That's 48 individual drawings the animator must make to describe that action.

MECHAR
And every actor who jumps the box, will do it with his/her own individual flare, which brings you, the animator, to making some choices. Who can jump the box in the most entertaining way?

WILLOW
Remember the second yardstick? Animation is about changing shapes.

NUALA
What exactly does that mean?

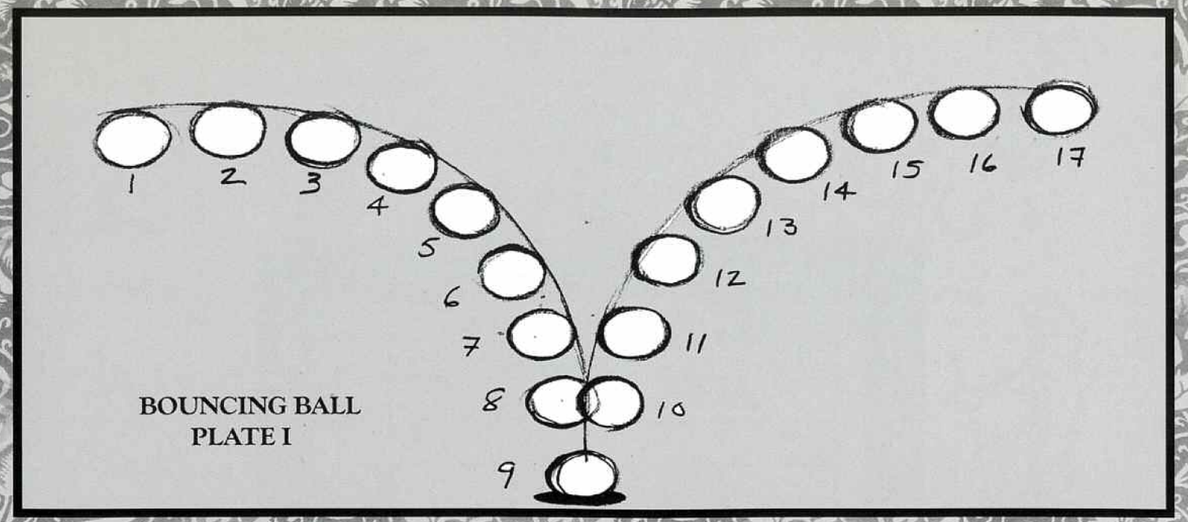
MECHAR
The basic principle of the bouncing ball is a good illustration of that.
Plate #1 *(SEE PAGE 13)* Normally, each of the 18 balls in the illustration would be on a separate piece of paper, and each one photographed onto a single frame of film. Note how the balls are evenly spaced. If the arrangement were photographed and projected, it would move as if the ball had no weight. But compare the arrangement of the balls to Plate #2.

Plate #2 By stacking the drawings close together at the top and spacing them out at the bottom, the movement of the ball would seem to have more weight. Furthermore, by changing the shapes of 6,7,8, and 10,11,12, and squashing 9, the bounce will have a familiar snap.

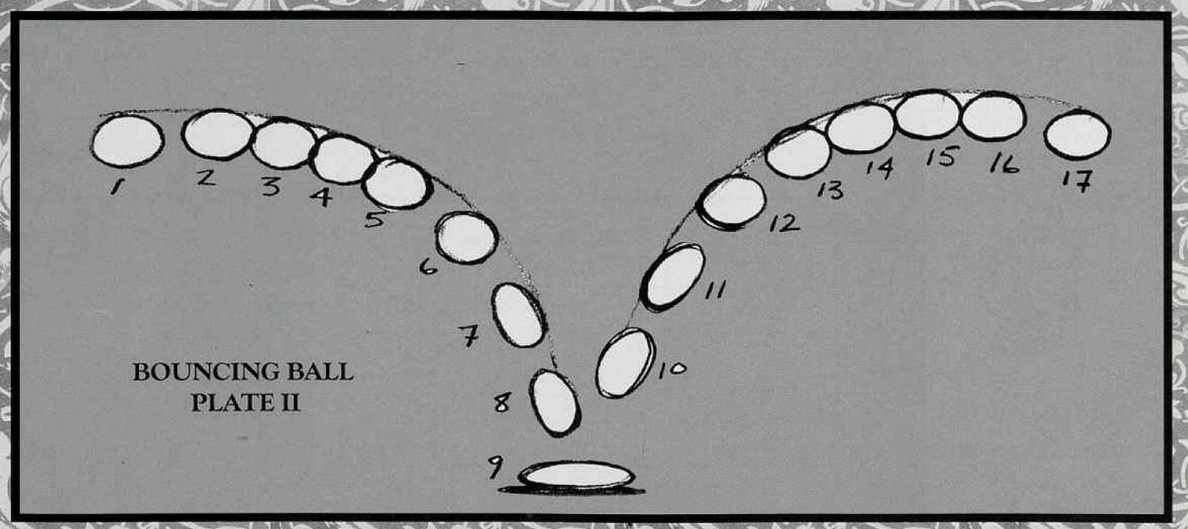
WILLOW
Giving the impression that your characters have weight, when they move is a big plus in creating the illusion of life.

NUALA
So when the man jumps over the box, the same bouncing ball principles of weight and changing shapes holds true?

WILLOW
Yes! Objects constantly squash and stretch, even in real life, but...



BOUNCING BALL
PLATE I



BOUNCING BALL
PLATE II

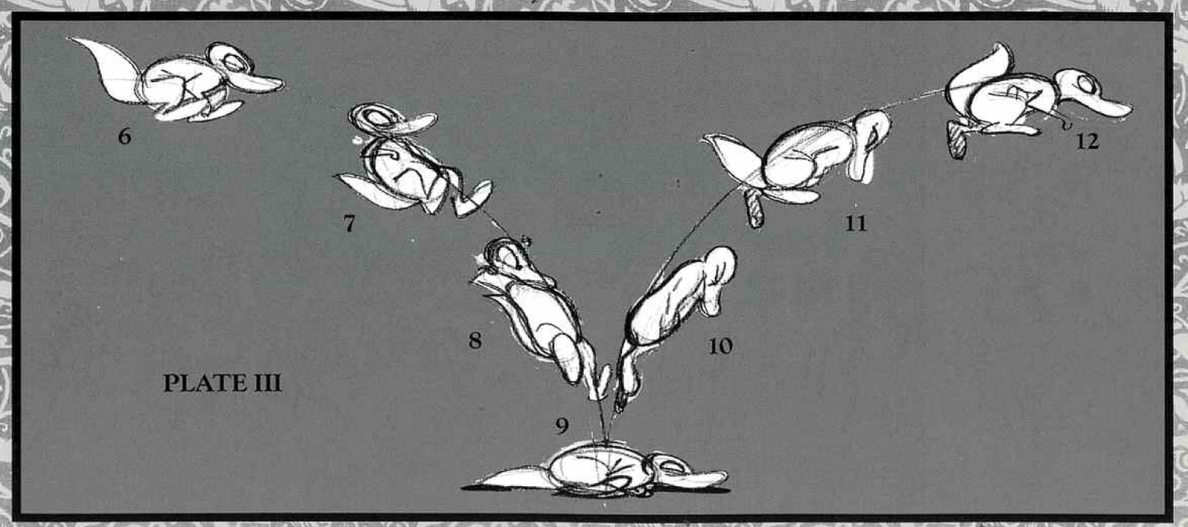


PLATE III

Seconds. frames, and footage on film.

SEC	FRAMES	FTG
.5	12	12 X
1.0	24	1 08
1.5	36	2 04
2.0	48	3 00
2.5	60	3 12
3.0	72	4 08
3.5	84	5 04
4.0	96	6 00
4.5	108	6 12
5.0	120	7 08
5.5	132	8 04
6.0	144	9 00
6.5	156	9 12
7.0	168	10 08
7.5	180	11 04
8.0	192	12 00
8.5	204	12 12
9.0	216	13 08
9.5	228	14 04
10.0	240	15 00

Timing Chart Instructions

Use a stopwatch to time your action as you see it played out in your minds eye. Subtract about one third of the time to arrive at the correct total for a crisp animated scene. Calculate your frames and footage on the timing chart.

MECHAR
Squash and stretch, condense and expand, contract and extend, whatever you call it, it is the very essence of the art. All fleshy materials do it. Rigid shapes are boring and not true to life.

WILLOW
Hold it! Can we just take a breath? Huh? Can we? Even I'm getting confused.

MECHAR
That'll be the day.

WILLOW
You're mixing it up. You've got it backwards.

MECHAR
Your point?

WILLOW
We've already discussed the seven yardsticks of animation. Right?

NUALA
Yes, that's right?

WILLOW
Well, squash n stretch is not one of them. Somewhere in there, without the slightest warning, you have led this whole discussion off into the tulip patch, completely confusing poor Nuala here.

MECHAR
Not at all.

WILLOW
I'm afraid so. You never once mentioned that you had segued into a new category.

MECHAR
I was about to, but you keep butting in.

WILLOW
Well, do it right!

Mechar's feathers are ruffled. His face reddens for a moment, then he softens and turns to Nuala smiling.

MECHAR
Yes, and now my dear, we turn our attention to the principles of animation. Not to be confused with the yardsticks of animation.

WILLOW
Never to be confused with...

MECHAR
...The yardsticks.

NUALA
What's the difference?

WILLOW
The yardsticks are an overview, a more general approach to your art. They are a way of measuring the quality of your creation. They are a guide. The yardsticks can even be applied to a single drawing or painting.

MECHAR
But the principles of animation deal with the analysis of action. They deal with the nuts and bolts of getting a character to move convincingly, having weight and vitality, so as to give the illusion that it is alive. The principles are mechanics of the art.

WILLOW
Squash and stretch is one of the principles.

MECHAR
Let's discuss anticipation.

NUALA
Oh, I've read a lot about that. It's the wind up that proceeds an action, right?

MECHAR
Very good. It's the move that prepares the audience for the action the character is about to take. Sometimes a character will do a group of actions all bunched together in a sequence. Unless each action is anticipated, the audience can get confused not being prepared for the movement before it occurs.

WILLOW
I also think that the best entertainment is often in the anticipation.

NUALA
Yes Willow, I agree. I once saw a clip of an opera singer, very funny, singing in a high register. Her sounds rattled everything on stage, but especially the crystal in the chandelier. Just as she was about to sing the highest and final note, she stopped, took in an enormous breath, rolled her eyes, closed them, squatted down, then suddenly, with a face like a whale, opened her mouth with eyes bugging out like saucers, and hit the note. I anticipated the shattering of crystal, but instead, her note was out of the range of human hearing, and the entire chandelier crashed on the floor around her.

WILLOW
Ah ha! It wasn't what you were expecting. The element of surprise is the very essence of comedy.

MECHAR
That's one of the chief functions of anticipation. It sets up the gag for a laugh. Some director's call it "aiming". Tell the audience where the character is going, but then, surprise them.

WILLOW
Let's launch into the third principle shall we? There are two ways to work your animation. 1. Working straight ahead or, 2. Working pose to pose. Some people say it is simply a matter of preference, but I'm not so sure it's that simple.

MECHAR
Working straight ahead is a bit risky. You cannot accurately control the volumes of your characters nor their placement on the background. It's like painting yourself into a corner.

WILLOW
On the other hand, if you plot out your action with poses – strong emotional personality poses, with all the appeal you can cram into them, your animation has structure.

NUALA
Certainly pose-to-pose would be the way to do an acting scene, straight ahead would be too hap-harazard.

MECHAR
Like baking a cake without a recipe and keeping your fingers crossed that it works.

WILLOW
I can think of another big plus. When you're animating two or more characters in a scene...

NUALA
They could bump into each other unless you plot out the choreography right?

WILLOW
Yes, right! You got it! You clever girl.

MECHAR
Here's still another vote for the pose system. It has to do with timing. When shooting a posed test on the computer, try different variations. Vary the number of frames you expose each pose. Your acting will change considerably with each version. Options are always good.

WILLOW
Speaking of options, I'm starved could we break for lunch.

NUALA
I'll vote for that.

MECHAR
We'll reunite in an hour.

NUALA
You will join us won't you?

MECHAR
No! I have my green drink; we'll talk timing charts after lunch.

LUNCH TIME

Mechar checks his watch as Willow and Nuala re-enter the classroom thirty-five minutes late.

MECHAR
Hmm. I'm so glad to see you. For a brief moment there, I suspected the two of you had been abducted by aliens.

NUALA
We met some animation students in the commissary. I guess we just lost track of time, sorry.

WILLOW
They were a total bore, narrow minded, opinionated and positively pig headed.

MECHAR
And the food?

WILLOW
Who was eating?
I really don't like to hear words that deny the influences that nature has on the creation of art.

NUALA
Some of the kids think it is cheating to copy from images around them.

MECHAR
Well, I think I agree with them. To copy is not art, but to be inspired by... well that's a horse of a different color, as they say.

WILLOW
Well, to be so arrogant as to think they can create something out of their own heads, with no point of reference in real life, is absurd.

MECHAR
Calm yourself Willow, it's merely the folly of youth. Time will instruct them.

If you fail to plan,
you plan to fail.

DRAGON'S LAIR

RONAN REVIVES FROM DIRKS SLUG TO HIS JAW, AND MAKES A BEELINE FOR THE COTTAGE.

EVEN DIRK HAS RUN AWAY BEFORE, BUT THIS TIME SEEMS DIFFERENT. RONAN IS PANICKED !

OKAY, OKAY I NEED SOMETHING TO..TO WRITE WITH

DEAR POP...

MEANWHILE

DEAR POP. DIRK'S A TWIT... GONE AFTER HIM. I WILL BE BACK SOON.

RONAN

DIRK IS STARTING TO CRABWALK HIS WAY ACROSS A SUSPENDED BRIDGE. HE HAS BARELY LEFT FIRM GROUND WHEN THE BRIDGE BEGINS TO BOUNCE. HE LOOKS UP IN HORROR. AT THE OPPOSITE END OF THE SPAN STANDS A 350 POUND VIKING WOMAN IN FULL BODY ARMOR. SHE CARRIES AN ASSORTMENT OF SWORDS AND AXES. SHE LOOKS IMPATIENT.

IF YOU'RE GOING TO JUST CRAWL, WE'LL BE HERE ALL DAY !

STAY PUT. THIS COULD GO ANY... MINUTE.

VERY WELL THEN.

IF YOU AIN'T GONNA BACK UP, HILDY'LL JUST SLIP PAST YOU !

LADY, ARE YOU NUTS ??

YOU'RE GOING TO GET US BOTH KILLED !

NO, I SUSPECT IT COULD EASILY HOLD TWICE YOUR WEIGHT ! !

WELL, DUH! YEAH! EVI-DENTLY.

SURE, I'LL HOLD TWICE MY WEIGHT 'CAUSE YOU AND I WERE ON IT, AND YOU'VE GOT TO WEIGH AT LEAST..

...AT LEAST??? GO ON, SAY IT !

WELL, AS A KNIGHT IN...

..TRAINING, I..I HAVE VOWED NEVER TO FIGHT A WOMAN FAT OR OTHERWISE

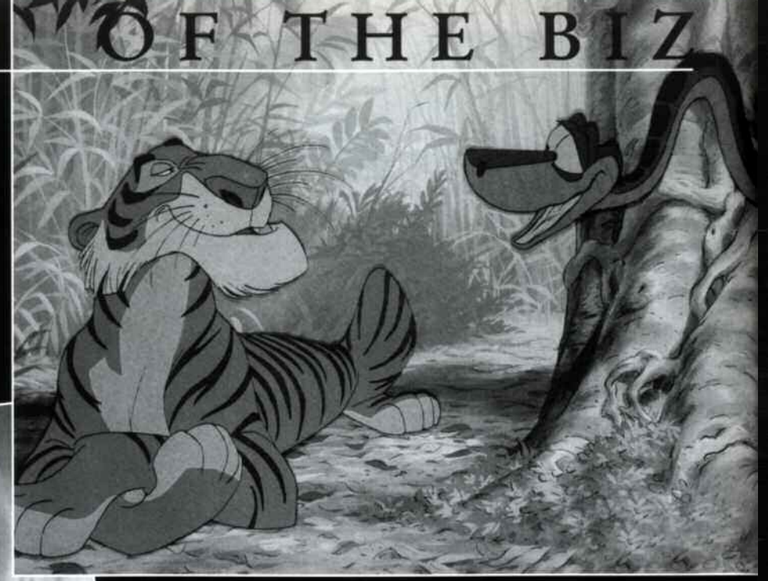
I'VE VOWED NEVER TO FIGHT A WOMAN EITHER

I'M NOT FAT ! ! I'M BIG BONED !

ARGH ! ALRIGHT YOU PIG-HEADED TUB OF LARD... YOU ... YOU WANT TO FIGHT ? !

TO BE CONTINUED

WALT TO WOOLIE

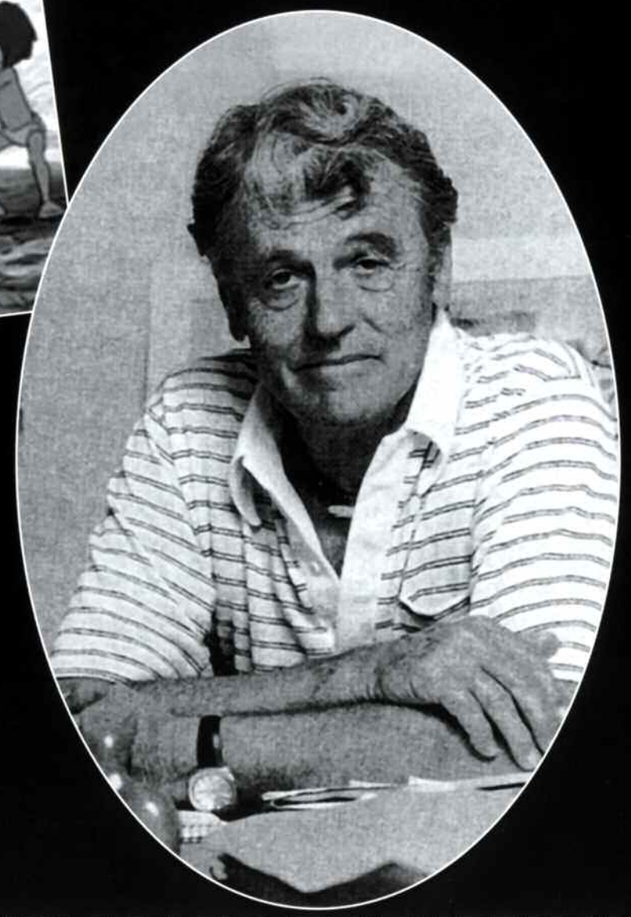


Sher kahn quizes Caa to find the whereabouts of Mowgli, the mancub.

Baloo teaches Mowgli self defence.

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

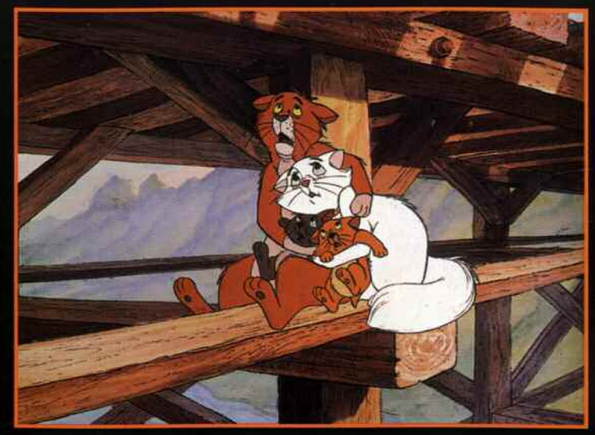
Walt's untimely demise in 1966 shocked the world, but the impact of his death hit hardest at the studio in Burbank, CA., where employees stumbled away from their desks in stunned silence, wondering about tomorrow. The board of directors had been well aware of their leader's illness, but had fiercely guarded the doomsday secret fearing a drop in stock prices if the news ever got out. For years, Walt had been grooming one of his animators for the shift of power.



WOLFGANG REITHERMAN

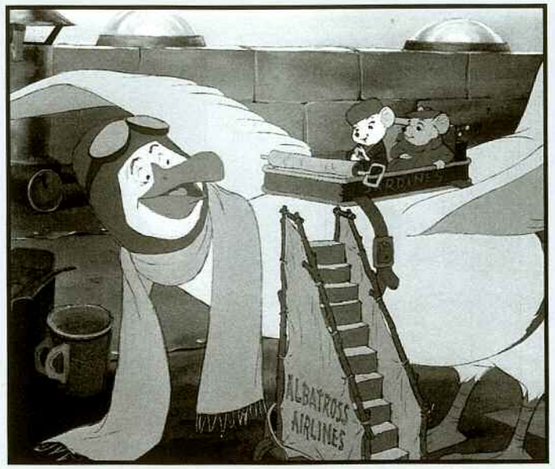
The other animators knew of it, and also knew the name of the designated heir apparent. But whether or not this 6'4" ex-fighter pilot from World War II had the personality to fill Walt's shoes was still a maybe.

My own life in the 1966, 67 was serendipitous. College had transformed me from a quasi-illiterate farm boy into an avid reader of books, lover of poetry, and college grad looking for a job. Like a fly that has lost one wing, I buzzed in frantic circles searching for my nitch in life. Finally, in 1971, the fidget and fuss over career choice had played itself out, and I returned to apply, once again, for a position at Disney Studio: This time, dead serious to ascend the Halls of Animation Academia. Woolie had already completed Jungle Book, produced and directed Aristocats, and launched the new feature, Robin Hood. I was officially classified as an animator, introduced to Woolie, then seated in a room in D wing. My first scene assignment on Robin Hood rested on my lap. I leaned back in the recliner to think about the assignment, but could not. My mind was occupied, reviewing the details of my first encounter with Woolie. I had no idea who this man was, yet, I was sure he would be part of shaping my own career. His physical presence could suffocated a person, like a high wall that obliterates the horizon blocking out everything but itself. His eyes were like a timber wolf's, gray and searching, hidden partially under heavy eyelids. The skin of his face, now tough and wrinkled by the sun, had grown lazy and expressless, and when he spoke, it was slow and deliberate, with words well chosen, whose tone masked both enthusiasm and indifference. Words that struggled to get out, to circumvent an unlit cigar held loosely in his teeth. Who was this man sitting on the King's throne? His physical appearance was certainly light years away from Walts. He reminded me rather of an old General scarred by too many battles, or even the



ARISTOCATS : *O' Malley, Duchess, and the three kittens find safety under the train trellis.*

ROBIN HOOD : *Robin hood, Maid Marion, and friends, celebrate the return of King Richard the Lionhearted.*



THE RESCUERS : Orville, the albatros flies Bernard and Bianca to a distant Port of call.

in, *Bambi* who had felt the rifle's sting and gotten up and walked away. Still, his wissened smile made it clear to any challengers, that this was the new King that squatted on Bunker's Hill; approach at you own risk!

In spite of these "cautionary" signs imposed by his body language, I felt a strong affinity for him. What's more, I knew his reaction to me was the same, and he soon began to show me small kindnesses, even showing delight as I daily grew in understanding. It was like a proud father teaching his son to drive the family car, and I found myself wanting to please him.

One day, I was called upstairs to his room along with several other animators. He was making notes on scenes we had all submitted, scenes that needed corrections. As my scene of Robin Hood appeared on the Moviola, he paused, then said, "Very disappointing animation. This acting is weak. Don, I expected you to do better … because you can." Then he finally looked right at me. "Don't settle at half way," he said. I later came to understand that criticism from Woolie was really a compliment. Those artists, not worth the bother, were pigeon holed as mediocre, or worse yet, ignored completely. Woolie was no diplomat.

For the next twelve months, I dug right down to the bottom of my soul to find the best in myself, partly for me, but more for him. I wanted to please him. I wanted to thank him somehow for all his tutoring, even the criticisms. One afternoon, as the note session was breaking up, Woolie asked me to remain behind. "Close the door," he said. "Have a seat." Now, I knew that nothing could lose me the popularity votes quicker than for my colleagues to think I was getting special treatment from the director, but it was too late. I closed the door, heard the latch click shut, and knew I had crossed a line. As I sat with frazzled nerves on a high wooden stool before his majesty, I imagined a dozen ears pressed to the keyhole outside. Woolie learned back in his chair and smiled. "Don, you're in a very awkward spot in your career and I want to give you some healthy advice." I pictured crocodiles just under the floor licking their chops in anticipation of me, the little Payson farmboy on the bone, and I expected any moment, the floor would collapse and I would be crock food. Again Woolie spoke, only this time like divine music. "You know, …" he began. "You could be a truly great animator. You have the talent for it, but …" "But?" It echoed in my head. "But, but! But what?" "But you'll have to give it up. You're going to be a director and a producer instead. And now the piece of advice, the director cannot be just one of the guys. Your crew will never be entirely honest with you, and they'll say mean cutting things about you, behind your back, and people out there in the dark, people you don't even know, will despise you and trash your good name. But you cannot strike back at them. What you must do is hold fast to your own beliefs. Work for the good of the picture. Ignore the rest. Directors should never judge people, any way, only ideas. Remember that. We'll talk more later."

"Director," I mused as I left Woolie's office. "Me? I won't do it. Give up animation?!! I won't." I

FOX AND THE HOUND : As puppies, the two canine's become best friends.

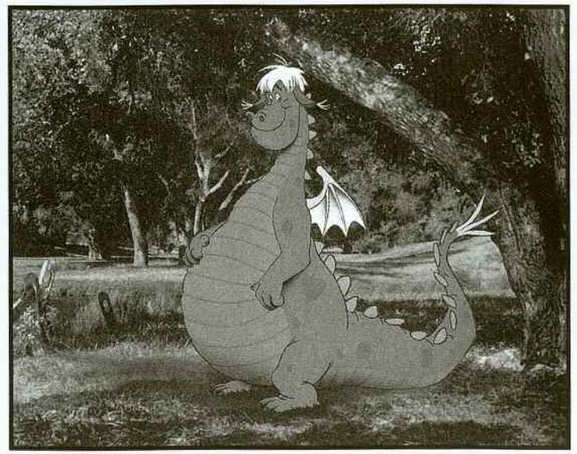
could barely organize a few drawings to create a scene. I knew nothing about organizing scenes to build a picture. But the seed had been planted, and I began to ponder it. The more the idea got comfortable in my head, the more uncomfortable I became with it being there. How does one train to be a director? Like every epistemological journey I've undertaken – it was always precept by precept, one foot in front of another, a few stumbles backward, then an inch forward. "Okay," I told myself, "I can do this." I'll start by asking every question I can think of." By weeks end, I ran out of questions; I had hit a dead end. I didn't even know what to ask! I needed to be instructed by experience. No sooner was the thought in my head, when Ron Miller, Executive Producer and President of Walt Disney Productions, who was now married to Walt's daughter Diane, and also sitting comfortably, or not, in Walt's old office, made one of those "snap" decisions that can only be reached by weeks of heated debate, or the simple toss of a coin. When Ron Miller asked me if I'd like to direct the animation on Pete's Dragon, I suspected Woolie was in on the decision. He knew the only way I would learn to swim was to be tossed into deep water. I told Ron yes, thanked him profusely and shook his hand. As the door clicked shut behind me, I sprinted for Woolie's office. He was grinning slyly as I approached his desk. "So are you going to do it?" he asked. "Time will tell," I responded. "I'm sure going to give it a shot. Have you got any advice?" "Sure" he said. "Please yourself!" "What?" "Please yourself on every decision. If you like what you create, chances are someone else will like it too. Oh yes, and one more thing, make 'em laugh; make 'em cry; make 'em wait. Don't ask me what it means. That's the advice I got a long time ago. You figure it out. Now get out of here. Congratulations!

CONTINUING THE MAGIC

Please yourself on every decision. If you like what you create, chances are, someone else will like it too. Oh yes, and one more thing, make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait. Don't ask me what it means. That's the advice I got long ago. You figure it out.

SMALL ONE : The small Donkey gorges himself on food from the marketplace.

PETE'S DRAGON : Pete teaches his friend Elliot, the Dragon how to read.



PETE'S DRAGON : Normally, Elliot is invisible, but reveals himself to Pete because they are friends.

ONCE UPON A GARAGE

ALTHOUGH THE UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM IS TOUTED AS THE SEAT OF HIGHER LEARNING, I'M CONVINCED THAT EACH FAMLY'S OWN GARAGE RUNS A CLOSE SECOND, OR MAYBE EVEN TOPS IT. GARAGE'S ARE THE LABS OF AMERICA, WHERE IDEAS ARE GERMANATED, NURTURED, AND FINALLY BORN.

Banjo, the runaway cat.

The workplace is so calcified with union rules and restrictions, that it is impossible to move freely about, exploring the territory. To excel in animation, we needed to learn everything about the approach to building a film. Animating is only a piece of a bigger whirligig. We, the plebs, needed to know about storyboarding, casting, recording, editing, track reading, exposure sheets, sound effects and music. And if we got through that list, the really meaty stuff was still there waiting for us. "Stuff" like story beats, pacing and themes.

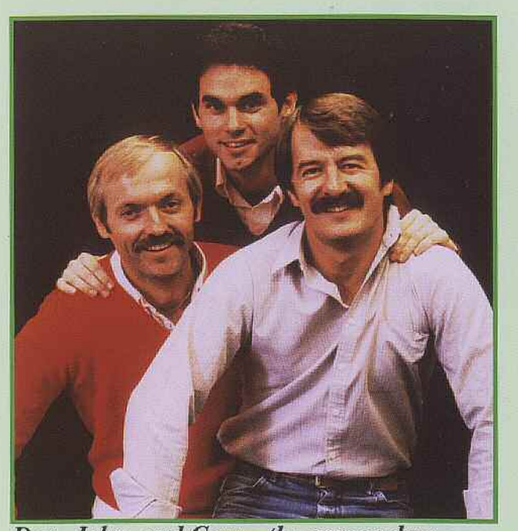
One day, I'm sure, Gary will suggest we write a book on the garage experience, but it will have to wait until we dock at Happy Acre Retirement Home and board our rocking chairs. Until then, I'll describe highlights. The whole feverish search for questions and answers took place over a seven year period, culminating in the short, *Banjo the Woodpile Cat*, in the last four and a half years from March '75 to May '79. It was a period of failure and success, accompanied

Crazy legs (Scatman Crothers) rescues Banjo, (Sparky Marcus) from certain disaster.

by a foolish notion that we were on a self appointed mission to re-discover the wheel, or even more absurd, reword the Lord's prayer. As ridiculous as we all felt, we drove on, hoping to be instructed by experience, after all, just watching the athletes at a track meet won't develop your own muscles for doing the high jump, the hurdles, or the pole vault. And then there was the low budget equipment. We bought a Moviola, and editing bench, and an old, very old, 35mm antique projector, just so we could have a hands-on approach. I hated the projector. Poor old thing had forgotten how many frames to show per second. It was either too fast, or too slow. At first I took to kicking it with the toe of my boot, but that only made matters worse. Out would come those sharp little steel sprockets and chomp, chomp, it would eat the film. Finally, I began thinking of the iron contraption as the great anti-projector, and threw a black drape over the heap of junk and called the Museum of Cinematic history. It was good riddance.

The welcome mat was always out for those who wanted to drop in and join us in the great cosmic search, and some weekends there were 15 to 20 eager beavers scratching away at the cat drawings and making plans for their futures. It was all so exciting, until the burgeoning event spilled out of the garage and into the house. Then the excitement became a thrill. We were no longer separate artists, each doing his own thing, but a team, a group of artists, like the musicians in a symphony orchestra, playing one piece. It lasted for four years. Banjo

Crazy legs discovers Banjo wet and crying in one of the city's back alleys.



Don, John, and Gary - the garage days.

never really made money, but then it wasn't meant to. It was meant to teach us. It did that very well indeed.

Banjo shares good times with three showgirls, Cleo, Melina, and Zazu.

Crazy legs convinces Banjo that the best times are really back home with his own family.

editor's scoop

Then I ask my wife, Aimee if she'd like to spend some quality time in San Diego in July, "At the Con," she answers, " You want me to go to the Con? No thank you. I'm holding out for Hawaii."

The calendar of events for the balance of 2001 has definitely got us buzzing around at the office. As of now, we are scheduled for four more field trips. Don and Gary have two seminars, one in Toronto, and one in San Francisco. Then there's the San Diego Comic Con in July, and Dragon Con in August. This schedule is monopolizing my time when publishing the magazine is really my first responsibility. I'm reminded of the adage: "When you're up to your ass in alligators, sometimes you can forget that you original objective was to simply to drain the swamp." Oh, did I forget to mention the storyboarding on the new Dragon's Lair movie –Yep, I did. On that front, we're riding a runaway horse. I should have put off remodeling my house till 2002. I keep catching my wife staring at me like she finally sees me in my true light, one cake shy of a stack, but then I tell her, " everyone is smiling in the office, the subscriptions are pouring in, and the bills are being paid; maybe we should just be grateful. We can always put our vacation to Hawaii off till January. I hear the weather is nicer that time of year." Then I ask my wife, Amy if she'd like to spend some quality time in San Diego in July, "At the Con," she answers, " You want me to go to the Con? No thank you. I'm holding out for Hawaii. I'II sell magazines to the natives at the Luan."

For those of you out there stalled in indecision, we still have a few back issues in stock, but don't wait too long- we're not going to reprint issues. You can order on our Website, www.donbluth.com. See you at the Comic Con. We'll be in booth # 1402 come and say "Hello". Regards, Dave.

All In Your Point Of View

Get some cash for your trash is a title of a song from a musical comedy called *Bubblin' Brown Sugar.* Nel Carter, whose voice could be the reincarnation of Ethel Merman's (plus about ten more deciples) drove home an idea that it is folly to throw your junk in the dumpster when someone out there might be willing to buy it. So, armed with that bit of advice, we will be arriving at Comic Con, San Diego, with numerous collectibles for your buying pleasures. After all, incredibly gorgeous artwork sitting on our warehouse shelves "ain't no good to nobody."

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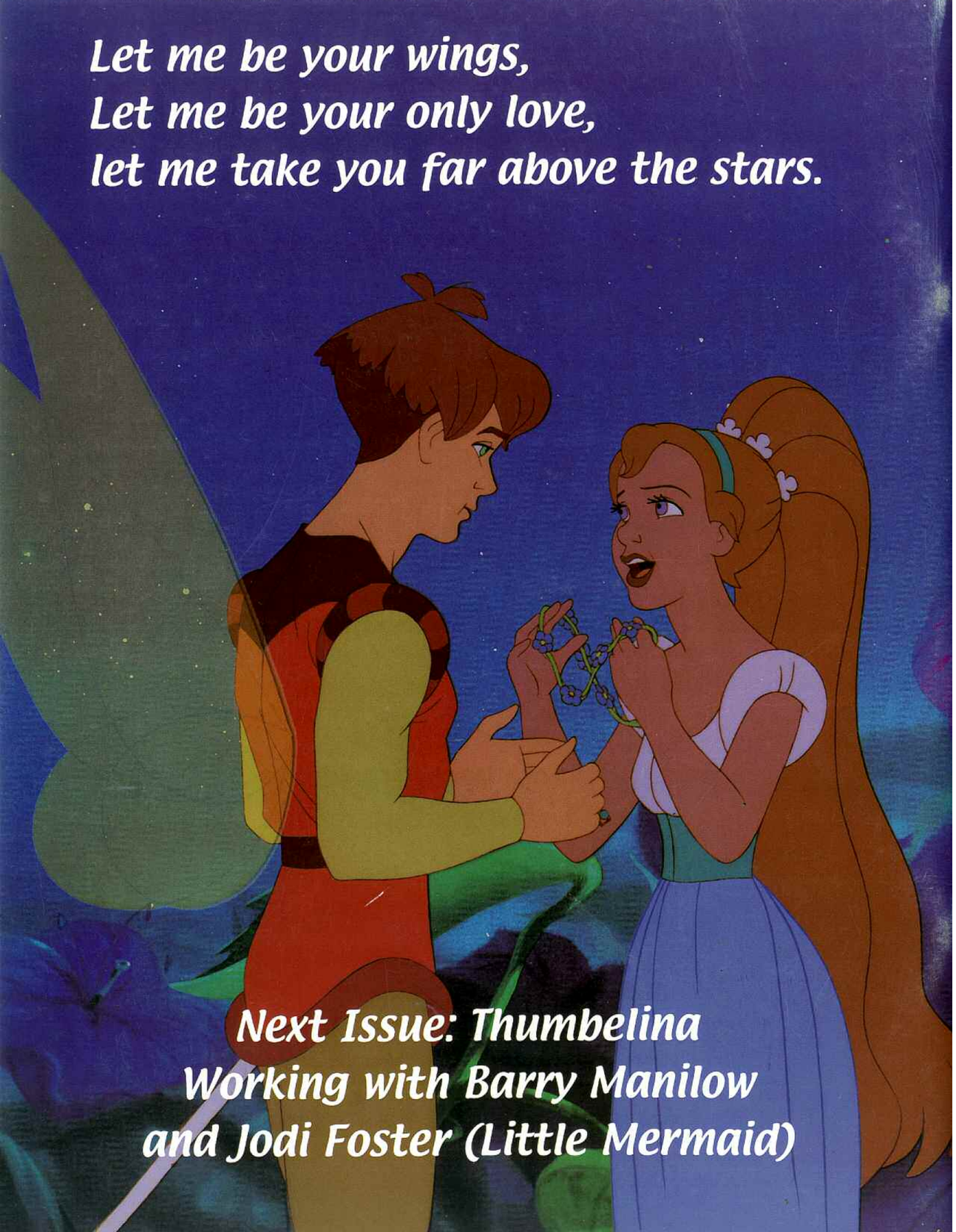
Let me be your wings,
Let me be your only love,
let me take you far above the stars.



Next Issue: Thumbelina
Working with Barry Manilow
and Jodi Foster (Little Mermaid)